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STATINTL

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Dodd Gun Bill Could Aid Conn. Sales

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This column is to correct certain things we have said in the past about Sen. Tom Dodd (D-Conn.) especially in regard to his gun legislation.

After Charles Whitman gunned down 44 people from the University of Texas tower, Sen. Dodd rushed out with a plea for action on his gun bill.

We have always given Dodd credit for bucking the gun industry during his three-year proposal to regulate the interstate sale of firearms. We have written a dozen or so columns vigorously supporting him and praising him for this work. We have now learned, however, that we underestimated the Senator. Former members of his staff have given us concrete evidence that he was secretly huddling with the gun manufacturers.

The Big Five—Colt, Olin Mathieson, Sturm-Ruger, Remington Arms, and Winchester—all have plants in Connecticut. We now learn that Dodd seldom made a move on gun legislation without consulting them.

Furthermore, part of his bill was highly beneficial to them, for he incorporated into the bill provisions that would restrict the importation of foreign-made firearms and ban mail-order sales across state lines. This would severely curtail the sale of foreign-made firearms in the United States, including cheap surplus mili-

tary weapons which have been flooding the market.

Far from hurting the domestic gun manufacturers, Dodd's bill would boost their business by eliminating most foreign competition.

Dodd introduced his gun legislation late in 1963 and it was referred to the Senate Commerce Committee, where hearings were held, with sportsmen and the National Rifle Association testifying in opposition. The bill did not get out of committee before Congress adjourned, Oct. 3, 1964.

Campaign Funds

Dodd then consulted with a view to reintroducing it in the next session of Congress.

At the beginning of these discussions, Dodd suddenly began collecting campaign contributions from firearms executives. He received a phone call at 4:05 p.m. on Oct. 13, 1964, from R. H. Coleman, president of Remington Arms. The Senator's phone log simply reported that Coleman "would like to see you."

By an interesting coincidence, Dodd received a phone call the next day at 3:05 p.m. from Frederick Lee, Washington representative for Olin Mathieson. The phone log was more specific this time, noting that Lee "would like to arrange a meeting to make his contribution."

The arms industry was really getting aboard the Dodd campaign wagon fast. The Senator's former aides recall

that both executives dropped by the office with campaign contributions and afterwards expressing their satisfaction with the Senator's cooperative attitude.

It is considered highly unethical for a member of Congress to accept a contribution from a business executive whose company is involved in legislation. Yet the Senator followed the same pattern with the gun industry as he did with the insurance industry which he was charged with investigating as a member of the Senate Anti-Monopoly Committee.

For Olin Mathieson's representative to contribute to Dodd, furthermore, was most unusual, because Spenner and John Olin have long been chairmen of the Republican money-raising committee.

Sen. Dodd showed his gratitude shortly thereafter by pushing a special bill through the Senate exempting Olin Mathieson from certain provisions of the Federal Firearms Act. The problem was explained to the Senator in a memo, dated April 19, 1965, from Gerry Zeiller, then working in Dodd's office.

"Fred Lee of Olin Mathieson visited the office today to request our help with a very serious problem..." wrote Zeiller. "Briefly, the situation involves the sale of pharmaceuticals in South Vietnam and Cambodia, the sales being financed by aid funds."

"An employee of Olin in Hong Kong dreamed up this shady transaction, and Olin, while not completely blameless, was not fully aware of the shenanigans. The government indicted Olin on 24 counts with a concurrent civil suit involving \$4 million in penalties."

Judgment Delayed

"Olin pleaded guilty to three counts of the 24 and settled the civil suit for \$263,000. At Olin's request, the U.S. district judge has held up the judgment of conviction until July 15 to give Olin a chance to introduce legislation to amend the Federal Firearms Act in an effort to stay in business."

"Under the provisions of the Federal Firearms Act, after conviction, Olin will have to go out of business as a firearms manufacturer in interstate or foreign commerce for the act is very clear in that it does not allow persons convicted of a crime to sell arms under the provisions of the act."

Dodd obligingly took charge of the bill. He has a reputation for dragging his feet on legislation, but it took him only two weeks to push the bill through his subcommittee and bring it to a vote on the Senate floor.

Dodd's main gun bill, three years after it was introduced, still has not passed the Senate.

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